

# Honorable Cecelia M. Espenoza



## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

### **HD4 State Representative** (2024-2026) Denver, Colorado

Elected in November of 2023 to represent North/West Denver. Appointed to the Judiciary, State Veterans and Military Affairs and Uniform Law Commission as well as Chair of the Statutory Revision Committee.

### **Roundtable of Former Immigration Judges** (2018-present)

### **Access to Information Appeals Board Member** (2015-2019) World Bank, Washington D.C.

Appointed Member of the Access to Information Appeals Board by the World Bank Executive Committee. Served with members from Scotland and South Africa to adjudicate appellate cases regarding access to information arising from the World Bank transparency process.

### **US Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review** (2000-2017- Retired with Top Secret Clearance)

- **Senior Associate General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel** (2003-2017) (Falls Church, VA)  
Principal legal advisor to the Director, General Counsel and Deputy General Counsel. Areas of expertise included immigration, the Freedom of Information Act, the Privacy Act, and Record Management.
- **Detailed to DOJ Justice Management Division (JMD) /Audit Liaison Group (ALG)** (2008-2009) (Washington, D.C.)  
Responsible for coordinating multi-component DOJ responses to sensitive Office of the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office audits involving law enforcement, privacy, national security, and intelligence community issues.
- **Board Member, Board of Immigration Appeals** (2000-2003)  
Appointed by Attorney General Janet Reno to the Board of Immigration Appeals, which is the appellate level of review for US Immigration Courts. Wrote high quality precedent, and non-precedent decisions regarding the application of the Immigration and Nationality Act to specific legal cases.

### **Associate Professor of Law** (1997-2000)

St. Mary's University, Center for Legal & Social Justice (San Antonio, TX)

Taught in the Criminal and Immigration Clinics, created a class called "Immigration Law and Crimes" and supervised the Hispanic Law Student's National Moot Court team.

### **Assistant Professor of Law** (1990-1997)

University of Denver, College of Law (Denver, CO)

Taught Criminal Law, Evidence, Immigration Law, an Immigration Law Seminar, and supervised students in Student Law Office-Criminal Law Clinic. Networked with local community members on immigration issues involving employer sanctions, voting rights and redistricting, and immigration. Leveraged community resources to create *Know Your Rights Clinics* at the Wakenhut Detention Center, staffed by a local American Immigration Law Association (AILA) chapter and law students from the University of Denver, and the University of Colorado which was the precursor to the Rocky Mountain Immigration Advocacy Network. Coordinated citizenship clinics and wrote a guide to citizenship, aimed at non-lawyers, distributed through Colorado Office of Refugee Resettlement.

### **Criminal Prosecutor** (1984-1990)

Salt Lake City Corporation and Sandy City (Utah)

Served as the lead prosecutor in over 1,000 misdemeanor trials for crimes including: DUI, theft, battery and assault. Negotiated pre-trial settlements and conferences. Rewrote and published the Sandy City Traffic Code. Designated as a small claims judge and served as the municipal representative to the Statewide Association of Prosecutors.

## EDUCATION

**Juris Doctor, University of Utah College of Law, Salt Lake City, Utah 1982**

**Honors BA Political Science, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 1979**

## **Executive Leadership Program Fellow, National Hispana Leadership Institute, 2003**

Completed four weeks of intensive leadership training and development including:

- Executive Leadership Program, JFK School of Government, Harvard University
- Leadership Development Program, Center for Creative Leadership

**BAR ADMISSIONS:** Colorado State Bar (1992)(Active and in Good Standing); Texas State Bar (1997)(inactive); Utah State Bar (1982)(inactive); and Federal District Court of Utah (1982)(inactive).

## HONORS

2025	Council of State Governments West - Leadership Academy Fellow, Colorado Springs, CO)
2025	Legislator of the Year, American Council of Engineering Companies (Denver, CO)
2025	Colorado Civil Justice League – Common Sense in the Courtroom Award
2025	Colorado American Institute of Architects – Legislative Champions Award
2025	MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Legislative Champion Award
2014	University of Utah College of Law Alumna of the Year (Salt Lake City, UT)
2021	Speaker on Critical Race Theory, U of Utah Alumni Event, (Webinar, SLC, UT)
2013	Keynote Speaker, Arkansas Hispanic Law Student Association (Little Rock, AK)
2010	Keynote Speaker, University of Utah Honors Program Graduation (Salt Lake City, UT)
2008	Named Honored Citizen by Arlington Public Schools (Arlington, VA)
2006	Leadership Arlington Executive Leadership Program (Arlington, VA)
2003	National Hispana Leadership Institute Fellow (one of 20 women nationally selected)
1997	Outstanding Service Award, Colorado American Immigration Lawyers Association - (Denver, CO)
1994	Honoree: "Hispanics Who Make a Difference" (Denver, CO)
1990	Distinguished Lawyer in Public Service Award (Utah State Bar)
1989	Regional Finalist, White House Fellowship (Salt Lake City, UT)

## PUBLICATIONS and LITIGATION SUCCESS

- *In Re Marriage of Sheehan*, 2022 COA 29 (Colo. App. 2022) [Pro Bono counsel]
- *How My Practical Immigration Experiences Impacted Clinical Immigration Law: The Colorado Experience as an Example*, 26 New York University Clinical Law Review, 169 (2019)
- *Relief for Undocumented Students: the DREAM ACT – A Piece of the Puzzle in Overall Immigration Reform or a Puzzle with Missing Pieces?* The Federal Lawyer (July 2009)
- Joined En Banc decisions and published Concurring and Dissenting Opinions as found in Volume 23 I&N Dec. (2000-2003) I & N Dec, #3443 - #3487.
- Encyclopedia of American Immigration § 11, *Alternative Faiths*, M.E. Sharpe (May 2001)
- *No Relief for the Weary: VAWA Relief Denied for Battered Immigrants Lost in the Intersections*, 83 Marq. L. Rev. 163 (Fall 1999)
- Federal Practice Manual on Immigration, West Publishing Co, Publication (Winter 1999)
- *Good Kids, Bad Kids: A Revelation About Due Process Rights for Children*, 23 Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly 407 (1996)
- *The Illusory Provisions of Sanctions: The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986*, 8 Georgetown Immigration Law Journal 343 (Lead Article)(1994)
- *The Simple Guide to U.S. Citizenship*, with Iris Sifontes and Anita Tellez, published through a grant from the Hunt Foundation, Denver, CO (1997)
- *Crimes of Violence by Non-Citizens and the Immigration Consequences*, Colorado Lawyer (1997)
- *The Violence Against Women Act: Relief for Battered Immigrant Women and Children*, W. Allen Spurgeon Fund for Pro Bono Continuing Legal Education (1996)
- *Relief for Long Term Legal Permanent Residents: Section 212(c)*, W. Allen Spurgeon Fund for Pro Bono Continuing Legal Education (1995)
- *Deportation Defense*, W. Allen Spurgeon Fund for Pro Bono CLE (1994)
- *The ABC's of Political Asylum*, W. Allen Spurgeon Fund for Pro Bono CLE (1991)
- Utah Women and the Law; Chapters: Small Claims Court and Criminal Law; Utah (1990)

**Cecelia M. Espenoza**

Representative Cecelia Espenoza represents House District 4 in North/West Denver, a community she has called home for over 30 years. Born to migrant farmworkers from Colorado, she was the first in her family to graduate from college and the second Latina to pass the bar in Utah. She began her legal career as the Migrant Attorney for Utah Legal Services and then was a prosecutor for six years before she moved to Colorado as the first tenure-track Latina to teach law in Colorado. She was also the first Mexican-American to become an appellate judge on the highest immigration court in the country.

She is focused on addressing the housing crisis, investing in our K-12 public schools, combating gun violence, and protecting reproductive rights while supporting the most vulnerable in our communities including: immigrants and refugees.

Rep-Elect Espenoza serves on the Judiciary and State, Civic, Military & Veterans Affairs committees, the Statutory Revision Committee and the Uniform Laws Commission.